

Collins...from Page 1

Mr. Tony Thomas
President and Chief Executive
Officer
Windstream
4001 Rodney Parham Road
Little Rock, AR 72212
Dear Mr. Thomas,

I am writing to you in regards to the hundreds upon hundreds of complaints my Congressional office has received regarding virtually every aspect of Windstream's conduct in Northeast Georgia. While I firmly support free enterprise and believe the Federal Government's role should be limited, the nature and consistency of the reports I have received leave me no choice but to write to you directly. Since elected to Congress, I've tried to work closely with your staff, sharing with them the nature of the complaints and urging their swift resolution. But over the past three years, the voices of my constituents and the appalling reports of your company's behavior have only increased in volume and quantity. It's time for Windstream to take my concerns, and those of your Northeast Georgia customers, seriously.

Although Windstream is a private company, the telecommunications industry is both heavily regulated by the federal government and significantly dependent on federal grants and other forms of funding. Given these facts, Congressional oversight of your company's actions in

Northeast Georgia is more than merited. And I believe, compelled. I have no doubt this letter will go unheeded, as the complaints of thousands of your customers have also gone unheeded. But I was sent to Washington, D.C. to represent the hard working families in Northeast Georgia, and I will continue to persist until we reach resolution.

As I'm sure you are aware, I've previously written to Chairman Wheeler with the Federal Communications Commission about Windstream's acceptance of Phase II Connect America Funds and your lack of demonstrated ability to meet the upcoming benchmarks. In addition to the concerns I expressed in that letter, and shared with your staff, there have arisen several other areas of concern that I respectfully request you review and supply a response to me in a timely fashion. If you seek additional clarification to any of these questions, I encourage you to reach out to me directly, or my staff. I will, of course, be sharing this letter and your response to the thousands of frustrated and angry Windstream subscribers in Northeast Georgia.

I am concerned that your networks in Northeast Georgia are at over-capacity. Would you agree with this assessment? If not, please provide documentation demonstrating that Northeast Georgia networks specifically

are not operating at over-capacity. If they are, please outline your plan to address this situation.

2. Please provide a detailed status update regarding Windstream's progress upgrading your copper networks to modern fiber in Northeast Georgia. Specifically, what percentage of the copper network has been replaced and what is the timeline for full replacement with modern fiber?

3. Of the fees that you currently collect from Windstream subscribers in Northeast Georgia, what percentage are being used to upgrade infrastructure in the same area as those subscribers reside?

4. In 2014, Windstream was granted by the Internal Revenue Service Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) status. Based on media reports at the time, Windstream's tax savings from this change in status was estimated to cut your company debt by \$3.2 billion and produce \$115 million annually in free cash flow. What is your estimated tax savings to date from REIT status, and what percentage of that estimated savings have you invested in broadband upgrades, both nationally and specifically in Georgia.

I appreciate your review of these questions and I look forward to your prompt reply.
Sincerely,
Doug Collins
Member of Congress

Veterans...from Page 1



Vietnam Veteran Dale Sissell shares a laugh with Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall after receiving his certificate on Wednesday, Feb. 17

James Lawrence Akins, USAF; Charles Richard Brown, Army; Richard Adam Cataldo, Army; Burch Kenneth Crawford, Army; Alexander Robert DeZayas, Army; Eric England, USMC; Clyde Jerry Gurley, Army; Stephan Douglas Gooch, Army; Bart Hoibraten, Navy; Franklin Delano Hunter, USAF; James Randall Jones, Army; Hoyt James King, Army; Harold Floyd Ledford, Army; Jonathan Edward Ledford, Army; Evan Ernest Legg, Army; Albert Edision Martin, USMC; James Preston McAfee, Navy; William Howard McCarter Jr., Army; Norman Joseph Naipavel, Navy; Phillip Archie Nichols, Army.

Rex Gordon Odom, Army; Michael Benjamin Spivia, Army; Gary James Stephens, Army; Herbert Joseph Teague, Army; David Lamar Coker, Army; Roy E. Hamby, Army; George F. Fischbach Jr., Navy; Jon Lemmon, USAF; Donald P. Sullivan, Navy; Ronald U. Chmiel, Navy; Ronald Tanner, USAF; Philip W. Gatlin, USAF; J.W. Preston, Navy; George W. Chapman, Army; Raymond Luther Bailey, USAF; Brannon Norris Gooch, USMC; James

Elisha Blitchington Jr., USMC; Charles Robert Satterfield, Army; Arthur O'Neal Jordan, Army.

Jerry Michael Edwards, USAF; Larry William Conley, Army; John Richard Burnette, USMC; Larry Jerome Davis, USAF; Robert Eugene Trevarthen, Army; Sidney D. Turner, Army; Charlie M. Hunter, USAF; Leon Davenport, Army; Hubert Harold Plott, Army; Bill Jones, Army; James Morris Dyer, Army; William Thomas Chastain, USMC; Thomas Loren Arline Jr., USMC; James R. Blair, Army; Edwin Benfield, Army; Jimmie Benfield, Army; Clifford Kirby Bowron Jr., Army; Brannen Brown, Army; Harold Lee Campbell, USMC.

Marion C. Crawford, Army; Edwin M. Crenshaw, Navy; Larry Demby, Army; Wes Dillard, USAF; Jerry Driskell, USAF; Richard Eggleston, Army; Doug England, Army; Fred Duane Freeman, USAF; Terry Mike Garry, Army; Chuck Grove, Navy; James E. Haines, Army; Richard Hoibraten, Navy; Charles William Honaker Sr., Army; Luther Hyatt, USMC; Jeffrey Charles Illston, USAF;



Pat Phillips, seated, accepts his Vietnam War Certificate of Honor. Pictured with Phillips are, L-R, GDVS Commissioner Mike Roby, Chairman Phil Youngblood of the State Veterans Service Board, and Board Member Dan Cravey.

Robotics...from Page 1

developing new strategies to recycle and repurpose to benefit the environment. The team chose to create a recyclable garden that is built from common items found in trash. The garden has an additional feature that uses composting worms to repurpose kitchen scraps and create fertilizer which is filtered to the plants. The result of their project research effort is an innovative idea that will improve how people can grow fresh vegetables without having access to a traditional garden.

Along with the project the team competed once again at state with thirty-two teams attending the event. As with previous qualifiers, the overall scores were good especially in Robot Design. The team received first place in the UGA State Championship for Mechanical Design. It should be noted here that all of these achievements have been accomplished during a rookie season for this new team. Congratulations on a



Front Row: Erin Kelley and Abby Mauldin Back row: Jo Ray Van Vliet, mentor, Seth Grizzle, Halen Holdaway, Liam King, Dr. Daren King, coach

job well done!
TCMS Praetoria Nave would like to thank our principal Mrs. Chastain, Superintendent Berrong, faculty, staff, students and community for all of their support. We would also like to thank Brown Haven Builders for their sponsorship. Finally, we would like to

thank our mentor Jo Ray Van Vliet and her family for all of their assistance. The current members of the TCMS Robotics competition team are Liam King, Abby Mauldin, Erin Kelley, Seth Grizzle and Halen Holdaway, with coach Dr. King and team mentor Mrs. Jo Ray Van Vliet.

Wrestling...from Page 1

"Both of our state placers are graduating, so there's a lot of room for young people to step up and make a big impact for us next year. I think we've got the kids to do that, they're just going to have to decide they're willing to put in the time and effort to do it, and see what happens."

For Coach Stowers, this season in particular was one of the hardest seasons he's had the privilege to coach in his entire career.

"I'm so proud of our whole team," said Coach Stowers. "We wrestled through adversity all year long. It's been a tough year from an injury/sickness standpoint, and kids just kept battling, kept battling."

"Even in the Sectional Tournament, Harold Cox wins his first match, then dislocates his shoulder and can't finish. That was just kind of indicative of our whole year. We just couldn't get everybody healthy at the same time."

And Daulton Rogers, who finished third at state, had

been wrestling with a broken finger from Christmas through to the end of the season.

"They continued to fight and continued to battle, and that's really all you can ask of them," said Coach Stowers. "I know Daulton was disappointed with third, but that's pretty good when you're the third best kid in the state, and really probably the second best - had he been on the other half of the bracket, he'd have been in the finals against the kid from Commerce."

"It is what it is, and all the kids battled all year long and worked real hard, and I'm just so proud of them and so proud of the kids that didn't qualify that worked hard all year, and the coaching staff for doing everything they did."

Joining Stowers for coaching duty were Brandon Rowland, Jim Harrison and Vonya Baldwin, and together, they celebrated both the highs and the lows of the team throughout the season as opportunities to learn and grow and get better at wrestling.

Chamber...from Page 1A

Program is probably the best and air people, you just can't get with because they're out on a job. You just don't see them, and they don't get to the Chamber. The Ambassadors are all over the county and they are involved in different groups and different businesses, so they hear and see and talk to members that we can't reach or business people that we can't reach. So at the meetings they come back and report what they've heard, if they've heard of new businesses opening or they've heard that one is moving or something like that. So we get the information first hand," said Lee.

The ambassadors also do events like ribbon cuttings, and the Business After Hours event. But their main task is to keep up with businesses that can't otherwise connect with the Chamber.

"They've been great as far as keeping in touch with the members that we don't see on a regular basis. That's a lot of the service people that don't have storefronts so a lot of the utility people, the heating

and air people, you just can't get with because they're out on a job. You just don't see them, and they don't get to the Chamber. The Ambassadors are all over the county and they are involved in different groups and different businesses, so they hear and see and talk to members that we can't reach or business people that we can't reach. So at the meetings they come back and report what they've heard, if they've heard of new businesses opening or they've heard that one is moving or something like that. So we get the information first hand," said Lee.

"The members feel like they are being given attention, and that's what they need. They need to feel like they're able to talk to somebody without feeling pressured to say the right thing. Like if they're talking to me, they feel like they've got to say what I'm looking for instead of just being able to talk to another businessperson and telling it like it is," she said.

For local businesses, keeping in touch with the Chamber is important because it affords privileges not given to non-chamber members. Chamber businesses have more networking opportunities and have their business promoted

online. "We get the information out there. Mostly the promotion is through the office here with the brochures and the website," said Lee.

She added that if someone needs to connect with a business, members of the Chamber get priority over nonmembers.

"We only refer members. We don't refer nonmembers," said Lee.

Going forward in the year, the growing Ambassadors are looking to change things.

"We want to change the way we do ribbon cuttings. We did so many last year. It was hard for the Ambassadors to leave their stores to get to the ribbon cuttings, because we had so many. So we're going to change those up a little bit, and we're going to change the Business After Hours. We're trying to do something different for the Business After Hours each time," said Lee.

"And then the Business Showcase is their responsibility. The Ambassadors started that program, so they are starting to work on that already for September," she said.



Vietnam Veterans of Union and Towns honor their country during the Pledge of Allegiance at the Fine Arts Center



Roy Hamby accepted both his and Leon Davenport's certificates that evening - pictured with Commissioner Roby, left



Pat Phillips acknowledges a standing ovation in his honor, for all the hard work he put in organizing that evening's event